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UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

(MEDICAL DEPARTMENT.)

MARCH 14, 1879.

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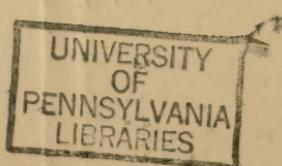
1879.

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UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

At a public Commencement held Friday, March 14th, 1879, at the AMERICAN ACADEMY OF MUSIC, the degree of Doctor of Medicine was conferred by the Provost upon ninety-one graduates, and that of Doctor of Dental Surgery upon twenty-five graduates, after which an address was delivered by JOHN ASHHURST, Jr., M.D., Professor of Clinical Surgery.

Collins, Printer.



ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE GRADUATING CLASS, MR. PROVOST, LADIES
AND GENTLEMEN:

ENGLAND'S great lexicographer, the learned Dr. Samuel Johnson, has well pointed out in the concluding number of that charming volume of essays, too little read at the present day—"The Idler"—that it is impossible for human nature to look with perfect equanimity upon the *termination* of many occupations or experiences which yet perhaps, while in progress, may not have been regarded with overmuch favour:—

"There are few things," he says, "not purely evil, of which we can say, without some emotion of uneasiness, *this is the last*. Those who never could agree together, shed tears when mutual discontent has determined them to final separation; of a place which has been frequently visited, though without pleasure, the last look is taken with heaviness of heart; * * * This secret horror of the last is inseparable from a thinking being whose life is limited, and to whom death is dreadful. We always make a secret comparison between a part and the whole; the termination of any period of life reminds us that life itself has likewise its termination; when we have done anything for the last time, we involuntarily reflect that a part of the days allotted to us is past, and that as more is past, there is less remaining."

Is it inappropriate, Gentlemen, to remind you that this day, called in accordance with time-honoured usage "Commencement" (as, indeed, it marks the beginning of your independent professional life), is

also an Ending?—an ending of your long period of pupilage (years taken out of the prime of your lives)—and that upon the manner in which you have spent this period will depend, in great measure, the success or failure, the happiness or disappointment, of your whole future careers? If your teachers, habituated as they are to the annual recurrence of these Commencement days, when those whom they have taught year after year, and whose faces have become familiar as they have learned to know them as more than pupils—even as friends—successively throw off the protecting cloak of student life, and stand forth armed and ready for the conflicts and duties of independent labour: if your teachers, I say, cannot forbear a feeling of emotion upon these occasions (and I venture to say that there is not one of us this day with heart and soul unmoved), how much more should you, to whom this occasion is an epoch of unsurpassed importance, check for a moment the natural and not unjust feeling of satisfaction and elation which you reasonably experience, and, reflecting that your undergraduate career is now ended forever, breathe a prayer that when you shall come to that last, great Commencement day on earth, before graduation to the future life, you may not have to reproach yourselves with any sad falling off in realization from the high aspirations and lofty self-promises which each of you makes this day.

But yesterday you were students: to day you are practitioners—nay more, as your title implies, *doctores*—teachers, who must instruct those committed to your care, both individuals and communities, how to avoid suffering, how to save life, how to elude

death, and, when the great change is inevitable, how to smooth the sufferer's declining path, and rob the grim monarch of his terrors.

And this leads me to speak to you somewhat of the *responsibilities*, of the *duties*, and of the *rewards*, of the profession which you have chosen as your life-work. Some few of you, by becoming resident physicians in hospitals, or by obtaining similar positions, will have the opportunity of trying gradually your powers, and, under the guidance of a senior who can resolve your doubts, and relieve you from burdens too weighty for you to bear, of putting in practice under the most favourable auspices those precepts which you have learned, and confirming the doctrines which as yet you know but as theory, by personal observation and experience; but by the majority of you, from the moment when you leave this hall, the duties and cares of practice must be met to a great extent unaided, and any one of you may within a day—nay, within an hour—have thrust upon him the awful responsibility of saving, or of failing to save, a fellow-creature's life.

Of all the several branches of our noble calling, none seems to me so peculiarly weighted with responsibility as that, the doctrines and mysteries of which have been laid before you by your Professor of Obstetrics. Others deal with but a single life, but the physician who undertakes the charge of a lying-in chamber, must decide, and often literally at a moment's warning, what shall be done to save *two* lives, the interests of which may even seem to demand, in some unhappy cases, widely different modes of treatment. But in return, there are than these no

circumstances under which the physician is more richly repaid, whether by his patients' gratitude or by his own feeling of legitimate satisfaction on account of difficulties overcome and benefits conferred: surely never is a doctor more truly a *deus ex machinā* than when, hastily entering an anxious circle of weeping relatives, agitated husband, fluttering nurse, and terrified patient, he is enabled to produce, after a few occult manipulations, a new being, who is thenceforth the hope of the family, and who in this free republic—however lowly his origin—need not despair of being some day a Senator, if not indeed the President of the United States.

But man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward, and the little stranger, so gladly welcomed and so eagerly cared for, will in all probability, before many years have passed, be laid upon a bed of illness, the cares and dreadful anxieties surrounding which, none but one himself a parent can appreciate. What can be more pitiable than a very sick child?

“There is,” as has been well said by a very eminent member of our profession, Dr. Charles West, “there is a great difference between a child when well and the same child when sick. When well it is all life and merriment; if a baby, springing in its nurse’s arms, smiling at everything, or ringing out its tiny laughter for very joy at being alive; or if it is older, jumping about, running backwards and forwards, full of frolic, shouting aloud with gladness, or in its more serious moods playing with its toys with the drollest earnestness. * * * But if illness comes; first the child loses its merriment, though it still shows just every now and then a sad attempt at playfulness, and then, as its illness increases, it grows more fretful; so fretful that nothing can go right with it. It cries to be laid down in its bed, and then

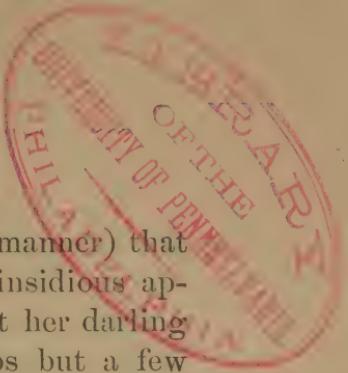
no sooner have you laid it there than it cries to be taken up again; it is thirsty, and asks or at least makes signs for drink, but nothing that you offer pleases its taste, and it pushes away the cup, irritated all the more by what you have so kindly done to promote its comfort. For days and nights this continues, * * * (and it is only by degrees that its childish ways come back to it, and that you discover that the illness did not destroy, but only took away for a short time, the little loving heart.)"

Now in this sad little drama the physician plays a most important part; it is not enough for him to come in for a few minutes once or twice a day, write a prescription, and take his leave: the doctor who is content with such a course will have scant success, whether in curing his little patients' illnesses or in retaining their parents' trust. To treat sick children satisfactorily, you must (I will not say, have children of your own), but you must be really fond of children, understand their little ways, and be able and willing to sympathize with and pity their discomforts and sufferings. You must win their childish confidence, else how can you make the necessary physical examinations for the recognition of their actual condition, and of the daily—nay hourly—changes, which their diseases occasion?

If you have paid due attention to our teachings, during your student's course, you are no doubt fully impressed with the extreme importance, in all cases, of that branch of medical science which deals with the recognition and discrimination of morbid conditions; but if there is any circumstance in which diagnostic skill is pre-eminently desirable, it is when the physician is called to a case of acute sickness in a child.

You are met at the door of the nursery, or perhaps at the entrance of the house, by the well-nigh distracted parents, and learn that your prospective patient, perhaps one of a large group of children, seemingly well all day, has, within an hour, become sickened, flushed, hot, and drowsy, and complained of sore throat ; and the mother recalls, with her heart in her mouth, that the little one has played with a neighbour just convalescing from scarlet fever. Has their pet caught the dreaded disease ? Will it spread to others of their little flock ? Must they send the rest away for safety ? If by your diagnostic powers you are enabled to reassure the anxious parent, and to tell her that her child's symptoms are really but of trifling import, and will have but ephemeral duration, what a load do you remove from that poor mother's breast !

Or take another case : you receive a message, but by no means an urgent one, to come and see a child who has a "bad cold ;" you are told that it has been coughing a little for several days, and that, the domestic remedies of goose-grease and squills having proved ineffectual, it has been thought right, but rather as a matter of form than from any, supposed, real necessity, to send for the doctor ; your first glance excites your suspicion by showing you a dusky hue of the child's face, and that peculiar, drowsy motion of the eyelids which you will learn to recognize as significant of impaired aeration of the blood ; you notice that the breathing is very short and rapid ; and, placing your ear to the chest, a few moments' examination confirms your worst anticipations, and you are forced to tell the mother (who has, perhaps, already



caught alarm from the gravity of your manner) that what she thought a mere cold, was the insidious approach of a double pneumonia, and that her darling is in imminent danger, and has perhaps but a few hours to live.

Of all the painful scenes which a physician is called upon to witness, there is perhaps none so utterly pitiable as the death-bed of a favorite child. There is a grim majesty attending death as seen on the battle-field, or in the wholesale slaughter of railway accidents; there is a solemn dignity in the death of a man of mature age—who has done his work, has fought a good fight, has finished his course, and has kept the faith: to such death has no sting—over such the grave claims no victory. But the death-bed of a child, or a young person just entering life, is most pitiable: it will be your duty to witness such; to feel the pulse growing weaker and weaker; to see the breaths becoming shorter and shorter—and then the long pauses between death and life—and, at last, that indescribable change of face—that startling, last gaze, as of the soul surprised at its entrance to another world—which tells you that all is over. And then, while you sit mute in the presence of the last enemy, there will arise that wail of women—Rachel weeping for her children—which I verily believe is the most heart-rending sound that mortal ears can hear. Happy the physician who can, in these supreme moments, not pharisaically, but from a full heart and with a loving soul, direct the mourner's glance to the only source of perfect consolation and true comfort, even by a single word (and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!)—He will surely find his recompense

both in his own consciousness of right doing, and in the thankful gratitude of those who have been bereaved.

Fortunately, all your responsibilities will not be of the acutely painful nature of those which I have sketched ; yet will they demand from you the most grave consideration, and upon your knowledge and ability to resolve the questions presented to you, will often depend the happiness and welfare of your patients. To take an illustration from my own branch of our profession : you will be consulted by a matron who has for months or perhaps years been conscious of the slow increase of a lump, or growth, the existence of which she has concealed even from her husband, carrying her heavy secret in her own bosom, not daring to bring it to the light lest her fears should be confirmed, and she should hear the verdict—"cancer"—dreaded more than death almost, by every woman. Are her fears well founded ? Is she indeed a victim of that frightful malady ? Or has she happily been mistaken, and is her disease one of a simple and non-malignant character ? Is an operation to be recommended ? Or can you say to her : This is a trivial affair ; it will probably never give you any serious trouble, or, if it should, it can be attended to at any future time as well as now ; it is a case of no urgency ? Gentlemen, let me assure you that the responsibility assumed by the surgeon in deciding a question of this character, is no light one ; and that unless by thorough acquaintance with the characteristics of morbid growths, and by careful and, if necessary, repeated examinations of your patient, you are able to arrive at a correct opinion, your position in undertaking the

treatment of such a case is in no degree one to be envied.

Take another example: you are consulted by a man, past middle life, yet by no means beyond the age of useful activity, who has long suffered from what may be called truly, if not very definitely, "*a bad leg.*" You exhaust your skill in minor surgery and your knowledge of the *Pharmacopœia*, but without avail; you strap it and you bandage it, you graft it and you galvanize it, but it won't heal. What is to be done? Some of you may say: "There is nothing left but to take the leg off!"—Gentlemen, if you have profited by the teachings of Prof. Agnew and myself, and I think I may add, by our example, when you reach the point of having to choose between "nothing" and a dangerous operation, reflect seriously whether perchance "nothing" may not be the safer and better alternative. If ever a noble profession has suffered in the house of its friends, it is when, in the name of **SURGERY**, reckless votaries of the knife have plunged into hopeless operations with the poor excuse that unless they operated they could do nothing.

To you, Gentlemen, who have chosen the department of **Dental Surgery** as the special branch of our common profession to which you will devote your time and energies, responsibilities will come—if not as painful and soul-absorbing as those which must be met by the physician engaged in general practice—yet not the less real and important as regards the welfare and happiness of your patients. I do not feel myself competent to pursue this theme further, nor is it needful that I should do so, for you are, doubtless,

already fully conscious of the seriousness and moment of the work, to enter upon which you have this day received the authorization of our venerable and venerated University. One thought, however, I must present to you, and this is that, as yours is the first class of Dental Surgeons which has been thus honoured, you must see to it that your example shall be one which succeeding classes may look to, and profitably seek to emulate.

With the responsibilities of professional life will come *duties*, not only to your patients and to the immediate communities in which you may live, but to your fellow-alumni of this school, and to the whole brotherhood of medical men existing throughout the republic and throughout the civilized world. And first let me urge upon you a duty which I wish you to consider as of the highest importance, and this is to *Honour your Alma Mater*. Whatever temptations to courses of doubtful professional propriety may assail you—and they will be many; whatever failures of professional virtue you may see in the practitioners around you—and they will not be few; remember that *you*, at least, are graduates of a school which has sent forth such men as Dorsey and Barton; as Norris and Eve; as James and Dewees; as Meigs and Hodge; as Drake and Chapman; as Mitchell and Jackson; as Bache and La Roche; as Pepper, and Gerhard, and Carson, and Smith; as that venerable man who, though the shades of night are fast closing around him, still bears the fame and prosperity of our University foremost in his mind and heart—GEORGE B. WOOD; and be well assured that, with the long

line of illustrious and honourable physicians, dead and living, who have gone out from the halls of this University as your exemplars, you have no right to do wrong.

Let me also urge you most strenuously to *Honour your Profession*. It is no idle expression, by which we speak of medical men in all parts of the world as our *professional brethren*; if a French physician writes to you, he will address you as “dear and honoured brother!”—if an Italian, or a German, or a Russian, he will employ terms expressive of the same sense of confraternity; and the honour and welfare of this brotherhood, it is your part to sustain and promote by every means in your power. Cultivate kindly relations with the other medical men of your vicinity; if there is an organized Medical Society in your neighbourhood, become working members of it, and if there is none such, induce your fellow-doctors to join with you in founding one. The influence for good, in a community, of an active Medical Society, can hardly be over-estimated; remember the old fable of the labourer’s sons and the bundle of sticks; *united*, you can accomplish any reform—work any change, almost, that you may desire; *separated*, and every one following his own way without respect to his neighbour, your voice will be as the babbling of brooks or the rustling of leaves—men will hear it, indeed, but will heed it not, and will pay no regard to its teachings.

Another way in which you must honour your profession is by contributing to the common stock of knowledge. Freely ye have received, freely give. We have taught you to the best of our ability; and in the books which you will from time to time buy, and in the journals which I trust you will subscribe

for, you will find the latest results of our science as recorded by the great teachers in all parts of the world. In return for this, give back as you have the opportunity. But do not waste your own time and that of others by indulging idle speculations concerning matters about which speculation is useless; nor expect to overturn the accepted doctrines of centuries by publishing one or two cases which further experience will show you to have been quite exceptional. Remember the advice of John Hunter to those who preferred *thinking* to *observation*: “Don’t think; try; be patient; be accurate.” If you have a plain fact to record, publish it for the benefit of your fellows; a simple observation—a clearly-reported case, even if in itself commonplace—is of more value than pages of surmise or of windy commentary. But remember, too, that other saying of Hobbes, of Malmesbury, that “there are more false facts in the world than false theories,” and beware lest you mistake for fact what is in reality but fancy: Don’t think; try; be patient; be accurate.

Finally, you must *Honour your Maker*. It was an old joke, but a bad joke when it was new, that “*Ubi tres medici, ibi duo athei* :” among three doctors there would be two atheists. I am thankful that the day is past when that could be said with even the semblance of truth: this is not the place, nor is mine the voice, to pursue this subject further; but surely we, who deal with the issues of life and death, should of all others be humble followers of Him who is the Author and Giver of life itself.

And now, having spoken to you of the *responsibilities* and *duties* of your professional careers, let me add

a few words concerning the *rewards* which you may look for: concerning *professional success, and the requisites for its attainment*. And here I must remind you that there are two kinds of success which you may seek for, and the means of getting which are widely different. The first, which I would venture to designate as *false success*, is that which is pursued by, unfortunately, a large number, but among the candidates for which, none of you, I hope, will ever be found. It is that kind of success which is desired by the charlatan and the empiric; by those who degrade their calling from the position of a noble profession to that of an ignoble trade. Should this, unhappily, be your aim, your mode of proceeding will be sufficiently simple. You will, of course, begin by abandoning all regard for our Code of Professional Ethics, as a tissue of unmeaning formalities, and an unnecessary hindrance in your onward career; you will scorn any consideration for the well-doing of other practitioners, and think only of what is likely to be of direct pecuniary advantage to yourselves; you will even avoid any friendly relations with other doctors, and rather prefer to pick a quarrel with them as occasion offers, so that you may have an excuse and justification to yourselves for vilifying them before the rest of the community. On the other hand, you will lose no opportunity of ingratiating yourselves, by superserviceable attentions and even servile flattery, with the rich men of your neighbourhood, and with those whom you may suppose to have political influence; and you will take particular pains to be intimate with the editor or reporter of your local newspaper, hoping that he may give you a friendly puff from time to time in

his columns. You will be “hail-fellow-well-met” with the police (whom you will encourage to call you “Doc.”), and you will strive to arrange matters so that you shall be the first called in the contingency of any unfortunate person falling from a scaffold, or being otherwise injured; while, even if some other doctor should get ahead of you, you will force your way through the crowd, insist upon taking charge of the case, and make up for any lack of knowledge or professional skill by loudness of voice and effrontery of conduct. You will pay special attention to mad dogs and to those who fear to become the victims of hydrophobia, and if by any chance a five-legged calf, or a double-headed pig, should come into your neighbourhood, you will not fail to make a public demonstration of the monstrosity, and see that an account of the same shall appear in the daily press. You will take no medical journals—they will be of no use to you—and you will not write often upon medical topics; but you will take every opportunity of giving certificates as to the efficacy of new medicines, instruments, and mineral waters, so that the proprietors of these articles, in advertising their wares, may advertise you as well; and if an epidemic should appear where you live, you will compile a few paragraphs from your almost forgotten text-books, and furnish them as a popular communication to your crony the Editor, in hope that their appearance in his friendly sheet may perchance serve to bring you a few patients.

But enough of this:—I feel sure that you are disgusted at the picture which I have drawn of the unworthy member of our profession, who seeks success by the ignoble arts and the devious methods of the

charlatan: the success which you will strive to obtain is that *true success* which is the legitimate and reasonable aim of honourable and high-minded men. And this success, whether it is to be measured by your obtaining exalted positions as teachers; or by the fame both at home and abroad which may reward the efforts of your pens; or by the numbers of patients who may throng your waiting-rooms and invoke the benefits of your professional assistance, will be dependent in great measure upon your possessing the same qualities which would secure your success in any other relation of life.

In the first place, you must be *honest* and *conscientious*. By *honesty*, I do not mean that you must cultivate bluntness of manner (which often gives unmeant and unnecessary offence); nor that you should think aloud, as it were, and blurt out to your patient and his family every fear, every suspicion even, that may cross your mind in the conduct of his case. But you must be honest in giving your full and earnest attention to the requirements of your patient's illness; honest in your daily watching the course of his disease; honest in asking for, and even insisting upon having, additional counsel, if the gravity of the case should demand it; honest in expressing your opinion as to the nature of the affection, and, if necessary, as to its probable issue; and, finally, honest in adopting the best measures in your power to promote your patient's recovery. I assure you, Gentlemen, that honesty and conscientiousness are, in the long run, appreciated by the most unreasonable patients, and that in Medicine, as in other affairs, Honesty is, after all, the Best Policy.

In the next place, you must have *common sense*. No man who is a fool out of the Profession, can hope to be very successful in it; he may have certain traits of brilliancy; he may win applause by meteor-like flashes of intellectual activity; but in the end his career will be a failure. The same qualities of common-sense which would make any one a sound and safe lawyer, or a good man of business, will go far to give him success as a physician.

Again, you must be *industrious*. Look at those who have obtained great success in our profession: they may or may not have had talent or genius, but they have all been industrious. They have toiled over their patients, day in and day out; they have read, and studied, and plied the author's pen, while others have slept or made holiday; they have proved the experience of the poet:—

“To scorn delights and live laborious days;”

and their industry, if other qualities have not been wanting, has been sooner or later rewarded.

You must, of course, have thorough professional *education*. If you have learned anything during the years that you have been with us, you have learned this; we have furnished you with the means of education, and have tried to show you how to use them; but you must not imagine that with the assumption of the doctor's gown, your education has been completed. As long as there shall be any secrets of nature undiscovered; as long as mankind shall have to contend with those remorseless enemies disease and death; so long must the physician be an earnest stu-

dent, as well as a practitioner of what he has already learned.

Then you must be *constant*. It is the *rolling* stone that never gathers moss. It makes not so much difference where you settle, but, having chosen a place of abode, keep to it. Get yourselves wives ; make for yourselves homes ; have a stake in the community in which you live. Unless you are good citizens and good neighbours you are not likely to become successful physicians.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that you must cultivate a character of *sobriety*, *purity*, and *decency*. What more detestable than a drunken doctor ! and purity of life is essential to the physician who would obtain real and lasting success. Though exceptional examples may be found of those who have gained distinction in spite of immorality, their lives will be found on close inspection, and at the end, to have been less prosperous than has been popularly supposed ; and their success will be recognized to have been but partial.

It is important that you should cultivate the quality of *decision*. In matters of pure science, it is often the mark of a wise man to remain in doubt ; but in the application of your science in practice, the ability to decide, and that promptly, is of the highest value : it is even better that you should do only the second-best thing for your patient, than that he should perish while you are hesitating which of several courses to pursue.

Finally, if you would be successful physicians, you must, with your self-respect, feel and show a *just respect for others*. This is a point in regard to which

the recent graduate is peculiarly tempted to go astray. You will return to your homes, and, meeting with practitioners of long standing, will find them, as to many technical matters and questions of modern science, less well-informed than yourselves; and you will naturally and almost unavoidably be disposed to regard them as "old fogies," and will be tempted to refuse them that respect and deference which you will think that they unreasonably demand. Beware of this mistake; when you have yourselves been a few years in practice, you will recognize your error, and you will learn that in no profession is it more true than in ours that—

"Old experience doth attain
To something like Prophetic strain,"

and you will realize that, though your inferiors in technical knowledge, the older physicians whom you will meet at the bedside are your superiors in those qualities of judgment and practical skill, which can be obtained by experience, and by experience alone.

And now, Gentlemen, let me say to you that if, with the opportunities for obtaining a thorough professional education which you have enjoyed during your undergraduate career in the University of Pennsylvania, you fail of success, it will be your own fault. To those that merit her favours, success is sure to come at last. It may be while you are yet full of the hopefulness and enthusiasm of youth; or it may be when you are forced to see that youth has fled and that you are entering upon middle age; or it may not be until you have begun to tread the downward path,

and are already walking in the shadow of the grave. But success will come. And let me remind you that it is not necessarily those who occupy the highest stations, or have the largest professional incomes, who are most truly to be regarded as successful. The plain country doctor—the hard-working dispensary physician in a large district—these “Gideon Grays” of our profession—may in reality lead as useful lives, and accomplish as much absolute good, as a Langenbeck, a Brodie, or a Nélaton. Let me read you a few lines written on the death of one of these humble practitioners of medicine, a hundred years ago:—

“ Well tried through many a varying year,
 See Levet to the grave descend,
 Officious, innocent, sincere,
 Of every friendless name the friend.

* * * *

“ When fainting nature called for aid
 And hovering death prepared the blow,
 His vigorous remedy displayed
 The power of art without the show.

“ In misery’s darkest cavern known,
 His useful care was ever nigh,
 Where hopeless anguish poured his groan,
 And lonely want retired to die.

“ No summons mocked by chill delay,
 No petty gain disdained by pride,
 The modest wants of every day
 The toil of every day supplied.

“ His virtues walked their narrow round,
 Nor made a pause, nor left a void ;
 And sure the Eternal Master found
 The single talent well employed.”

Ah! my friends, it will after all be, not the question of how many talents each one of us may have been entrusted with, but what use each may have made of those which he has possessed. And if you entertain a just sense of the responsibilities and privileges of your profession, regarding it not as a means of selfish, personal aggrandizement, nor of mere pecuniary gain, but as a noble vocation, affording opportunity (as none better) for serving God and benefiting your fellow-men, you will realize that to have health and strength to do good in your generation and to fulfil your duty in whatever station of life you may be called to occupy, is to obtain the highest and most honourable success. And if you sometimes grow weary with long expectation, you will remember that—

“They also serve who only stand and wait.”

Be patient then; be earnest; be faithful; and remember what the wisest man who ever lived has told us is the “conclusion of the whole matter:”—

“FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS;
FOR THIS IS THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.”

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